



Bethesda Community

G A R D E N C L U B

"Ninety-eight Years of Brightening Lives and Landscapes"

www.bethesdacomunitygardenclub.org

Vol. 48, No. 2 ■ October 2021

Member of
The National Capital Area
Garden Clubs and
The National Council of State
Garden Clubs, Inc.

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Photo by Caroline Turner

Caroline Turner shared
a photo of Anemones
thriving in a sunny area.
See page 4 for more
photos from her autumn
garden.

As the saying goes, we are living in interesting times. We continue to adapt. As I finish this edition of the newsletter decisions are still being made about how to proceed with this month's general meeting. Once the BCGC Board has come up with a plan Karen Fricke will send an email to members with details about whether the meeting will be a hybrid Zoom/in-person combination or remain virtual on Zoom.

Lois Brown

What's Holly Doing Now?

Jane Malish

Holly Shimizu, our first speaker of the 2021-2022 meeting year, is going to speak to the club on herbs that will flourish in our gardens. But before she embarks on her presentation here's what to know about her. She has a master's degree in the science of horticulture from the University of Maryland and she's worked in public gardens in Europe. When she returned from Europe, she became the first woman curator of the National Arboretum's National Herb Garden and then she worked as the chief horticulturist at the U.S. Botanic Gardens. She has managed the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond, VA. She is known to many gardeners from her appearances on PBS' "Victory Garden" program and she still speaks on National Public Radio. She retired from the US Botanic Garden where she was the Executive Director from 2000 to 2014. She is on the boards of horticultural entities including the American Horticultural Society and the American Botanical Council and she has received many awards and honors. In retirement she consults on horticulture issues for Arlington National Cemetery, and oh, by the way, she has written and illustrated a children's book, *Figgy and Fiona Search for a Home*. She divides her time between Lewes, Delaware and Glen Echo, Maryland. Don't miss this opportunity to hear a well-known, accomplished and respected gardener share her wide knowledge on her first interest in the horticultural world, herbs.

Environmental Concerns

Barbara Collier

Grasses: Friends and Foes

At this time of year, many grasses make their identification easier by sending up an inflorescence and setting seeds. And controlling seed dispersal, as we all know, is essential if we want to manage the spread of



Stiltgrass going to seed

part of this process, it's handy to have something that will replace the stiltgrass.



Nimblewill (*Muhlenbergia schreberi*)

Back in February, I wrote about growing and propagating some of our native ornamental grasses, warm-season bunch grasses in particular. At that time, I didn't mention nimblewill (*Muhlenbergia schreberi*), an extremely common warm-season perennial native grass. It is not a bunch grass: it has a spreading, mat-forming habit and can be untidy looking, especially in a manicured lawn, as it goes brown and dormant from fall to late spring. Most of us have it already and have probably been weeding it out for years. However, many native plant lovers not only tolerate nimblewill but encourage it; some mow it as part of a lawn, and others use it as a ground cover. They value it for its

unwanted plants. For instance, the dreaded annual Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*) flowers in the fall, but its blooms can apparently produce some fertile seed even before the flowers open, so trying to remove this plant before then is crucial to depleting the seed bank and hindering spread. As

toughness, its usefulness to wildlife, and especially its ability as a perennial to compete with stiltgrass, as it likes the same habitat.

Fortunately, it is relatively easy to tell the two grasses apart, allowing one to find and pull stiltgrass—whose pale green leaves have a distinctive

off-center silvery stripe—when it sneaks in among the smaller, blue-green leaves of nimblewill. In various areas of my yard, I have been pulling stiltgrass and leaving nimblewill and can report that persistence pays off. I have a driveway pad whose cracks now seem to be all nimblewill, and in various edge areas, nimblewill is well established. Of course, I will probably be pulling stiltgrass forever anyway, but the nimblewill definitely helps. And especially at this time of year, when it's going to seed, I find the nimblewill quite attractive.



Nimblewill in fall



Pretty purple plumes!...

So imagine my surprise when I was checking some neglected nimblewill for stray stiltgrass and discovered perfectly lovely purple grass plumes emerging from it. Alas! It turned out to be an invasive annual grass I had not heard of before: *Arthraxon hispidus*, small carpet grass or joint-head grass. Upon diving in, I discovered that the base of the grass is very distinctive, with clasping heart-shaped leaves. As this too



...which emerge from heart-shaped leaves

is an annual grass, I may have curtailed its spread by getting it when it was at its prettiest. (I gather its seed-banking properties are not yet known, so I guess I'll find out.)

And of course, there was stiltgrass hiding in there, too. Like stiltgrass, carpet grass spreads by rooting its nodes in the ground. In looking up carpet grass, I was not surprised to learn that it is often found in the same habitat as stiltgrass—something else for the nimblewill to battle.



Invasive fountaingrass

A distinctive inflorescence led me to yet another invasive grass this year: a form of fountain-grass, either *Pennisetum*

alopecuroides or *Cenchrus setaceus*. I did not recognize it until it bloomed, at which point I realized I had been nursing a viper in my bosom (otherwise known as my front yard). I had seen this grass volunteering elsewhere and identified it as one of those attractive imports that turns out to have invasive tendencies, but had not noticed it in my own yard before. It took some digging to get it out, so next year at this time I will be on the lookout for any strays that I missed.

Another attractive invasive that I find volunteering in my own yard and elsewhere is Chinese silver grass, *Miscanthus sinensis*. This one I grew myself in former



Chinese silver grass, *Miscanthus sinensis*

times, until I realized how invasive it was. My clumps were big enough to show up in Google satellite images, so digging them out was a chore. Since *miscanthus* has been widely planted in gardens, its wind-borne seeds have led to the invasion of more and more natural areas in Maryland. In the garden, you may see many *miscanthus* volunteers with a silver stripe on their leaves, but the best way to recognize them is when they flower, as the handsome inflorescence is quite recognizable.

The moral here? Watching out for these and other invaders can become a regular cleanup task in the early fall. Luckily we can take this one on in all the time we save by not raking away leaves, not cutting down dry seed stalks, and generally avoiding other traditional tasks that interfere with our overwintering insects and hungry birds.

Just when most stuff is looking tired (especially me) there are always lovely surprises late in the year. This Fall we are enjoying the big white Montauk Daisies which should have been cut back in the spring, the rebirth of a Clematis with the cooler weather, Anemones which I have finally learned need more sun than I thought they did, and the prolific tiny white flowered Mongolian Aster.

Caroline Turner



HORTICULTURAL NOTES

The Garden Room

Carole Ottesen

An enclosed garden or garden "room" is a space in which one can indulge in the beauty and pleasure of being outside in a place as comfortable and safe as it is inside. Dating from notions as far back as the Garden of Eden to Persian paradise gardens to modern times, the enclosed garden has never lost its popularity.

Recently, in the process of cleaning out my files, I came across notes taken in an interview in the 1980s with the late Ryan Gainey, a prominent and flamboyant Atlanta, Georgia garden designer who championed garden rooms.

Gainey devised a stepwise scheme to make what he called "*a hortus conclusus*." He always began with step number one, the frame. He sometimes used fences or walls for a frame, but usually favored "architecture achieved horticulturally." He used hedges and other upright plants for privacy, always working from large ones on the outside to smaller elements within.

He felt that any garden room must also have a heart, a place where the "functions of the house could spill out onto an outdoor area with tables for working and dining, and chairs to sit and enjoy the view." He would then "subdivide small impersonal expanses into smaller intimate spaces." These would be joined by paths on which one could wander to enjoy the garden's vignettes.

Finally, he would "fine tune the garden." He would construct charming scenes in small clearings along the paths, created by mixing artifacts and plants in associative ways. Gainey's favorites were pieces of American roadside art, flamingos, shells, rabbits, chickens—simple objects that evoke feeling in the way a kewpie doll, that traditional prize in a carnival game of chance, recalls a small town on a summer night.

The various elements he used were not to everyone's taste, but, somehow, he made it all work for his own garden and the many people who hired him to create their garden rooms.

Photos of his garden are freely viewable on the internet,

